

Collective Bargaining Agreement will Level Out the Field

Washington, DC - Rep. Linda Sánchez (D-CA) applauded the agreement today between the National Football League (NFL) and the National Football League Players Association (NFLPA) to level the playing field for retired and disabled football players and current players.

“The agreement today is a touchdown for retired and disabled football players who should not be forgotten nor deprived of benefits,” said Rep. Linda Sánchez. “These players helped build the legacy and popularity of the NFL and are entitled to the benefits they earned. I applaud DeMaurice Smith for his dedication to these players and their well deserved agreement today.”

Sánchez, a longtime advocate for fair treatment of retired and disabled football players, sent a letter on September 15, 2009 to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell urging him to guarantee that there would be no reduction in pension or disability payments to retired players in the event of an uncapped 2010 football season.

Sánchez has literally been driving this issue down the field by following up her prior work on the issue of equity for disabled players with the request that Commissioner Goodell put his promise that there will be no reduction in pension or disability payments in writing. Many league retirees, particularly those who helped build the league in its early years, rely on their pensions to pay basic expenses and would be in serious financial jeopardy if their pensions were suddenly reduced.

The NFL today agreed to sign a proposed amendment to the Collective Bargaining Agreement with the NFLPA to effectuate this commitment.

Rep. Sánchez has also noted that team values appear to have increased an impressive 550% since 1995 and that pre-1993 players received a smaller share of revenues than they do now. She has asked the NFL and the NFL Players Association (NFLPA) to work together to address this inequity. Specifically, Sánchez would like to see a substantial “legacy” payment for players who retired before 1993 that would be funded separately from the pool of funds for current players.

“While owners enjoy not only substantial anti-trust benefits and the financial growth and success of a multi-billion dollar organization, those who literally put their backs on the line to build the League’s capital have not received a fair share of the spoils as they aged and developed long-term health problems.”

Two years ago, as Chair of a Judiciary Subcommittee, Rep. Sánchez held a hearing that highlighted problems the retirees had in fighting through red tape while trying to overcome multiple surgeries, dementia, and homelessness.

“Just like any other job - football players are entitled to a fair and just retirement and disability plan,” continued Sánchez.

Text of Rep. Sánchez' letter to Commissioner Goodell is below.

September 15, 2009

Commissioner Roger Goodell
National Football League
280 Park Ave., 15th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Re: Equity for Disabled and Retired Players

Dear Commissioner Goodell:

As you know, I am an advocate for fair, adequate, and appropriate treatment of retired and disabled football players. I am writing to commend you on the National Football League's ("NFL" or "the League") guarantee that there will be no reduction in pension or disability payments to retired players in the event of an uncapped 2010 football season. It is my understanding that the NFL Players Association ("NFLPA") has proposed an amendment to the Collective Bargaining Agreement to effectuate your commitment. Retired and disabled players' issues remain a priority for me and many of my colleagues. I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep me apprised of whether the League intends to execute the proposed amendment.

On a related note, the 2009 Forbes' National Football League valuation data was recently brought to my attention. In this current economic climate, I am happy to see a profitable business with increased revenue and operating income. Forbes calculated a 7% increase in revenue for the league and a healthy 31% increase in operating income for the individual teams. It would be reassuring to know that our retired and disabled players will share in the league's economic success.

Most tellingly, it appears that the average value of a team has increased 550% since 1995—the earliest date of publicly released data. If this figure is incorrect, would you please provide the teams annual or average profit increase since 1993? My understanding is that prior to 1993, players received a smaller share of revenues than they do now and retired players received only very limited benefits. Therefore, the players who are in the most need of help are the ones who have not benefited financially from the tremendous growth of the sport and the financial success of the owners since 1993.

I wonder if the parties involved might work together to see this inequity addressed. Specifically, I would like to know if the NFL and the NFLPA would be willing to agree to a substantial "legacy" payment for players who retired before 1993 that would be funded separately from the pool of funds for current players (as I understand the vast majority of benefits for retired players to be funded)?

Again, I appreciate your personal efforts and the efforts of the League to guarantee benefits to our retired and disabled football players. I look forward to hearing your response. Thank you for your stewardship on this issue.

Sincerely,

Linda T. Sánchez